



Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and the Environment

OFFICE OF THE MINISTER

2ND Floor Executive Building, PO Box 100 Koror, Palau 96940

Telephone: (680) 767-3125 Fax: (680) 767-3380

Email: palau.mafe@palaugov.org

The Honorable Steven Victor
Minister
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and the Environment
Republic of Palau

Republic of Palau Statement 3rd Regional Meeting of Pacific Ministers of Agriculture and Forestry

[Statement]

Alii (Hello)! I bring you all warm greetings from the beautiful island nation of Palau!

Those of us in the Pacific are deeply aware that any transformation of our food system needs to be fully integrated from ridge to reef, and our ocean partners must understand the connections we see daily between land and sea, forest and ocean, and agriculture and aquaculture. After all, those of us in the Pacific know exactly how valuable fish bones are as farm fertilizer! It's our job to raise the awareness of the rest of the world of connections such as these between our blue and green economies.

Palau has embarked on its pathway to transforming agriculture and agroforestry to increase food security and create new economic benefits with the theme - #KeledANgercheled, Our Food is Our Responsibility. Our methods blend traditional ways with modern technologies: for instance, we are investing in solar technologies to add value to cultural crops, and we use social media to share community knowledge about best farming practices. Rather than converting native forests to farmland, we are improving degraded lands through time-intensive amendment and conversion. However, this romantic approach to growth is not a stand-alone solution, especially since Palau needs to triple agricultural production and consumption by 2030 to even begin to reduce our global vulnerabilities to climate change, supply chain bottlenecks, and price shocks. We are looking to our FAO partners, other technical partners, and Pacific neighbors to help us meet this expansion goal in a way that balances our cultural needs with our food security needs.

Palau is making excellent progress with the implementation of the Pacific Organic Standard, and we are proud that our first group of organic certified farmers and farms was a traditional women's group farming taro. It is critical that all of us in the Pacific uphold the Standard – like the theme of this week: "Growing Together" – to add value to our Pacific Organic investment. Because the other critical aspect of transforming our food systems is not simply to grow more but to gain more from our efforts. We all have small populations working on limited arable land, and thus the rapid introduction and adoption of new science and technology are key to our success. We count on our technical partners to keep us flying, and our Pacific neighbors to keep us grounded.

Speaking of flying, last month Palau and Australia launched a new air service connecting Palau with Brisbane, Australia via Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea. While this flight will make it much easier for our Pacific neighbors to visit us, it opens up new markets for agricultural exports. Like all Pacific islands, Palau has unique food products that would be appreciated by friends all over the world. We need to work together to take advantage of markets and collectively promote our Pacific Ocean goods as the high-value products that they are. That way, we can all truly "Grow Together" to grow local food security and ocean-wide prosperity.

Kom Kmal Mesulang (Thank you very much).